

Air Force member reflects on China EP-3 incident

SAN ANTONIO — The lone bluesuiter released by Chinese officials after 11 days of captivity thanked his Navy and Marine aircrew comrades for the high degree of professionalism and training they showed during the incident.

Senior Airman Curtis Towne was one of 24 crew members aboard an EP-3 Aries reconnaissance plane who were detained in China for 11 days after making an emergency landing on a Hainan Island airstrip following a midair collision April 1 with a Chinese F-8 aircraft.

The airman is currently spending some “quiet time” with his family in northern California. He is a cryptologic linguist assigned to the 390th Intelligence Squadron at Kadena Air Base, Japan.

Towne recalled the events, remembering how the EP-3 plummeted toward the South China Sea after the collision.

“I was really thinking about dying,” he said. “It was scary. Everyone’s training really saved us. Afterward, it kept us a tight and cohesive unit. I’m really thankful for that because the situation really went well. It could have been a lot worse.”

Eventually, the pilot, Navy Lt. Shane Osborne, landed the wounded EP-3 on Hainan Island, a Chinese province about 350

miles southwest of Hong Kong. Towne said landing in a communist country, at the moment, took a back seat to simply being alive.

He and the remainder of the crew were treated “relatively well,” he said, and were even able to eat and watch a little television (ESPN, in fact). Towne said they stayed in billeting quarters.

“People have tried to get me to compare my experience to being in the Hanoi Hilton or the Iran hostage affair. It’s not even close,” he said emphatically. “I thought a lot about my family and friends. We were never really sure what was going to happen.”

He said his team was allowed to interact, playing cards and passing the time talking. The crew even obliged one of their guard’s more unusual requests — to teach him the words to the Eagles’ song, “Hotel California.” They were allowed to sleep, but Towne said they were “kept up pretty late” some nights.

Eventually, Towne said, he knew he would be released, particularly after the first U.S. military officer was allowed access.

“I knew the situation was in our favor at that point,” he said.

He summed up the experience and reflected on his time in the Air Force. “I still enjoy my job. I enjoy being an airman.”

Officials approves 2001 selection board schedule

RANDOLPH AIR FORCE BASE, Texas (AFPN) — Air Force officials have approved two changes to the 2001 selection board schedule.

The command screening board convening date was changed from Sept. 17 to Sept. 19 and the colonel judge advocate general competitive category was added to the colonels board that convenes Dec. 3.

Results from boards are generally released eight to 10 weeks after the boards adjourn.

The updated 2001 schedule is:

- April 30 to May 4: enlisted sup-

- plemental boards;
- May 7-11: special selection boards;
- June 18-29: lieutenant colonel medical service corps; major line, judge advocate general, chaplain, MSC, biomedical sciences corps, nurse corps; captain JAG;
- July 30 to Aug. 3: enlisted supplemental boards;
- Aug. 20-24: special selection boards;
- Aug. 27-31: captain line, JAG, chaplain, MSC, BSC and NC;
- Sept. 4-14: professional military

- education board;
- Sept. 19-28 command screening board;
- Oct. 3-5: colonel Air National Guard, second session;
- Oct. 9-19: chief master sergeant evaluation board;
- Oct. 22 to Nov. 2: colonel medical corps/dental corps; lieutenant colonel MC/DC; major MC/DC;
- Nov. 5-21: lieutenant colonel line, JAG, chaplain, BSC, NC; captain JAG; and
- Dec. 3-14: colonel line, JAG, chaplain, MSC, BSC and NC.

Air Force releases 2001 critical skills list

RANDOLPH AIR FORCE BASE, Texas (AFPN) — The Air Force has released the chronic critical skills list for 2001.

This list is designed to help reduce shortages of staff, technical and master sergeants in certain sortie-generating and readiness-related skills by giving airmen eligible for promotion to these noncommissioned officer grades a promotion advantage.

Specifically, people serving in chronic critical skills are promoted higher than the Air Force average. For example, if the Air Force average for a particular promotion cycle is 15 percent, then people in chronic critical skills are promoted at an 18-percent rate.

An Air Force Specialty Code is placed on the list when the skill’s manning is below, and projected to remain below, 90 percent. Once placed on the chronic critical skills list, an Air Force specialty remains on the list for a minimum of two years or until NCO manning for the specialty is above 95 percent. The current list will be in effect for the calendar 2001 staff, technical and master sergeant promotion cycles and consists of the following Air Force Specialty Codes:

- 1A2X1, aircraft loadmaster;
- 1A3X1, airborne communications systems;
- 1A4X1X, airborne battle management systems;
- 1C0X1, airfield management;
- 1C1X1, air traffic control;
- 1C2X1, combat control;
- 1C3X1, command post;
- 1C4X1, tactical air command and control;
- 1C5X1X, aerospace control and warning systems;
- 1N0X1, intelligence applications;
- 1N1X1, intelligence imagery analysis;
- 1N3XXX, intelligence cryptologic linguists (all linguists);
- 1A8x1X, airborne cryptologic linguists are considered as 1N3XXX for promotion cycle 01E for staffs through master sergeants;
- 1N4X1, signals intelligence analysis;
- 1N5X1, electronic signals intelligence exploitation;
- 1T2X1, pararescue;
- 1W0X1X, weather;
- 2A1X4, airborne surveillance radar systems;
- 2A5X3X, integrated avionics systems; and
- 2A6X3, aircrew egress systems.



Photo by Tech. Sgt. Jim Varhegy



New recruit?

Above: Cadet Mike Thiesen, quarterback for the U.S. Air Force Academy Falcon football team, presents a team jersey to President George Bush after he presented the football team with the Commander-in-Chief’s Trophy in a ceremony on the White House South Lawn May 4. Left: The Commander in Chief’s Trophy sits ready on the White House South Lawn. The trophy is awarded yearly to the winner of a round-robin tournament among the service academies. The Air Force Academy has won the trophy 10 of the last 12 years. The Academy’s senior class never lost a game to any of the other service academies during their four years there.